

The Poetry of Luis Cernuda: Order in a World of Chaos. By NEIL C. MCKINLAY.
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viii + 183 pp. £30.00.

It is now some thirty years since Tamesis published two of the most influential studies of Luis Cernuda's poetry in English, Philip W. Silver's *'Et in Arcadia Ego': A Study of the Poetry of Luis Cernuda*, and Derek Harris's *Luis Cernuda: A Study of the Poetry*. It is fitting, therefore, that the same publisher should recently have published this volume, the first book-length monograph on Cernuda in English for approximately a decade. McKinlay meets the challenge of finding an original approach to a book as analysed as *La realidad y el deseo* by proposing a reading of it that seeks to do full justice to its complexities and contradictions. McKinlay's aim in doing so is to move beyond what he considers the simplification of Cernuda's work implicit in earlier critics' emphasis on the unity of *La realidad y el deseo*. For McKinlay, this simplification can be avoided by reading Cernuda's work in the context of the widespread nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century Western European and Spanish loss of faith in an ordered world because the 'dialectical opposition' between order and chaos lies at the center of this 'crisis of faith' in Cernuda's poetry (p. 9).

Chapter 2 outlines the characteristics of the ordered universe found in the poetry as well as the causes and consequences of the disintegration of that ordered world. For its part, the third chapter indicates the reasons for the speaker's search for absolute order before analysing the mechanics of the speaker's search for God, and how Cernuda's poetry expresses the loss of faith. Chapter Four addresses love, one of the two principal ways that, in McKinlay's view, the speaker attempts to realize his desire for permanence in the material world. The chapter's final section examines the purpose of love, which, by the time of *Donde habite el olvido*, McKinlay considers to have become 'spiritual enrichment' or a 'search for order' rather than erotic satisfaction (p. 107). However, McKinlay continues, in keeping with the interweaving of spiritual satisfaction and desire in Cernuda's poetry, even when the later poetry's speaker appears to find order through love, he retains an awareness of chaos.

McKinlay begins his final chapter, which addresses the part art plays in the search for order in the material world, by exploring Cernuda's theory of art and the poet in terms of order and chaos. In the remaining two sections, McKinlay looks at Cernuda's poetic practice and traces the move towards 'literary chaos' (p. 140) in Cernuda's supposedly surrealist books, a tendency that, for McKinlay, has ended by the time of *Donde habite el olvido* and is thrown into reverse by the subsequent 'triumph of literary order' (p. 153). However, McKinlay concludes that this tendency and its reversal are more apparent than real since Cernuda's surrealist poetry is not wholly meaningless and his later poetry contains the potential for its own destruction.

Despite his occasionally hyperbolic language, McKinlay's stimulating argument and insightful close readings of Cernuda's poetry represent a valuable contribution to our understanding of *La realidad y el deseo* and make this a study to be recommended to all serious students of twentieth-century Spanish poetry.

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